

**Editorial: Lectori Salutem,**

At the beginning of this last issue before the cut-off date for the REF2014, the British Research Excellence Framework, a few words on the utility and futility of bibliometric indicators as quality measurements of scholarly publication. Regular readers will know that *Dutch Crossing: Journal of Low Countries Studies* since 2011 is indexed in all important citation and indexing services, including the ‘big two’, the *Arts & Humanities Citation Index (AHCI)*, part of ISI Thomson-Reuters’s *Web of Science*, and Elsevier’s *Scopus* database, and has received an INT1-rating, the highest category, on the History list of the controversial *European Reference Index for the Humanities (ERIH)*.

To this list we can now add an *h-impact* factor calculated by Anne-Wil Harzing’s *Publish or Perish*, an alternative bibliometric tool to the above listed commercial services, on the basis of information available openly on the internet and indexed by Google Scholar. Even if the current REF will not directly use metrics like this and in spite of many academics’ reservations and scepticism about these computational forms of research assessment that the editors of this journal share to a good degree, metrics are highly likely to play an increasing role in future rounds of research assessment which is why we are happy to report that *Publish or Perish* at the time of writing calculates an *h-index* of 5.0 and rising for *Dutch Crossing*. This is an index that attempts to measure both the productivity and impact of the published work of a scientist or scholar, or in this case a journal. The index is based on the set of the most cited papers and the number of citations received in other publications. Readers interested in playing around and getting a feel for what metrics like this mean can download the programme freely on Harzing’s website.<sup>1</sup>

On to the contributions of the present issue that all focus on aspects of the Dutch or Belgian self-conceptualisations and self-images at various points in history: Liza Oliver (Northwestern University, Illinois) opens the issue with her study of Dutch Brazil in the gaze of Frans Jansz. Post, the first European artist to paint landscapes from the new world. Sent to South America from 1637 to 1644 by Johan Maurits to record the development of the then Dutch colony, Post provided his audience at home with numerous Brazilian landscape paintings that, quite uniquely among 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch landscape paintings, correspond to the scientific and cartographic while simultaneously evoking the scenic and picturesque. As a result, Post’s paintings are often disjointed with fragmented delineations between foregrounds representing Brazil’s flora and fauna and middle- or backgrounds showing broader mapped terrains with sugar mills and slave labour. Rather than viewing the different layers separately and the foreground aspect of Post’s work as merely decorative additions, as hitherto has frequently been the case, Oliver explores the inter-relationship between the natural history foregrounding his work and the middle/background. She argues that Post was attempting to negotiate between several different layers of meaning: namely, how to represent Holland as having succeeded in gaining colonial control over a foreign country while still indicating the dangers and instability of such an endeavor in an exotic and unforgiving terrain.

Christine Levecq (Kettering University, Michigan) investigates Early Dutch travel writing about the other side of the Atlantic, West Africa. Especially the accounts of Pieter de Marees’s travel to the Gold Coast (1602) and Pieter van den Broecke’s journey to Cap

Verde, Angola and on to the East Indies (1634) offer a distinctive contribution to European africanist writing of the time, as their emphasis is on trade, on a rational exchange of goods between equal partners, rather than on exploitation or conquest. This surprising focus, as Levecq explains, was the sign of a new identity the Dutch were busy creating for themselves as a virtuous, honest and Calvinist people opposing what they saw as Roman-Catholic corruption and tyranny. Even as they displayed common prejudices about cultures they considered primitive, the Dutch developed a discourse of egalitarianism and fairness in exchange that suffused the descriptions of their encounters with the rest of the world. De Marees's and Van den Broecke's accounts show how both attitudes toward the other could go hand in hand. They thus highlight the fuzziness of early European racial thinking, as the sense of difference conveyed in these texts has much less to do with race than with culture, and also tally with the Dutch desire to present themselves as a new nation anchored in fairness and innocence.

From a cultural historical angle Stijn Knuts and Pascal Delhaye (Leuven) turn their attention to late 19<sup>th</sup> century Belgium in which the most popular of Belgian sports took shape – Cycling. Dissecting the sociocultural dialectics between cities and countryside in the period known as *Belle Époque* (1890–1914), their analysis of the changes the new mobility brought about highlights bicycle tourism to the countryside as a source of sociability, entertainment and aesthetic sensations as well as of hygiene, morality and patriotism for the urban bourgeoisie in a period of growing unease with urban society. While paradoxically this trek to the countryside allowed for the spreading of urban cultural attitudes into rural spaces, the bicycle's democratisation around 1900 led to the image of cycling in the countryside as morally and physically advantageous now being redirected at the working masses, becoming increasingly focused on both socially integrating and controlling this group.

Geert Buelens' (Utrecht/Stellenbosch) essay, based on his keynote to the 9<sup>th</sup> ALCS conference *Low Countries – Big Cities* in Sheffield (2012), offers an analysis of the on-going discussion about 'Dutch identity' that has dominated both scholarly and public debates in the Netherlands ever since two political assassinations shook the peaceful country at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Challenging the consensus that a post-1945 emphasis on internationalism, cosmopolitanism and Europeanism in combination with a lax migration regime alienated the Dutch from their national identity until a craving for that identity reappeared with a vengeance, Buelens approaches the topic from a popular culture angle, by investigating how aspects of Dutch nationalism and internationalism are reflected in the oeuvre of the popular Dutch rock band 'the Nits' (1974–present) and how their evolution in this respect mirrors or nuances current debates about the elite's position vis-à-vis national character.

Javier Gimeno Martínez et al. (Amsterdam) investigate the interplay between Design and locality in their investigation of 'creative cities' in the Low Countries, cities that become convincingly associated with creative practices, such as design and fashion. Employing a constructivist approach, the article analyses the formative processes of how location and creativity are associated. It focuses on the establishment of three narratives of urban creativity: Eindhoven, Antwerp and Brussels. Each case is studied by positioning it against its cultural and economic contexts, such as the globalization of trade, European integration and the importance of tourism in post-industrial societies. By comparing them, the paper

concludes by considering the role of creative cities in the cultural valorisation of design and fashion, transforming them into effective calling cards for European cities.

Let me end this editorial column by announcing the date for the 10<sup>th</sup> biennial ALCS conference which will take place from 10–12 September 2014 at University College London. Please save the date! A Call for Papers will have been published by the time these lines go to print<sup>2</sup> and a selection of the best papers is planned to be published in this journal. As always best wishes for good reading!

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<sup>1</sup> Anne-Wil Harzing's *Publish or Perish* <<http://www.harzing.com/pop.htm>>, last accessed: 06 July 2013.

<sup>2</sup> 10<sup>th</sup> biennial ALCS conference 'Discord and Consensus' <<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/dutch/alcs2014>>, last accessed: 06 July 2013.